

**EXAMINING SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO PREADOLESCENT AND  
ADOLESCENT DRUG USE IN COMPARISON TO NATIONAL STATISTICS**

by

Gilbert Morales

THOMAS VAIL, PhD, Faculty Mentor and Chair

GENNARO OTTOMANELLI, PhD, Committee Member

THYRA FOSSUM, PhD, Committee Member

David Chapman, PsyD, Dean, Harold Abel School of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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## Abstract

Extensive research exists about preadolescent and adolescent illicit drug use. Research findings indicate numerous reasons why preteens and teens use and abuse drugs. Southern New Mexico was the focus of this study because a new threat exists in this geophysical area. This threat involves Mexican drug cartels. Mexican drug cartels are known to manufacture, distribute, and control illicit drugs readily available in Southern New Mexico. The study's purpose was to determine if significant differences existed between Southern New Mexico adolescent drug use and drug use nationally. The theoretical framework for this study was based on the common sense explanatory model of teenage illicit drug use (B. L. Nuno-Gutierrez, O. Rodriguez-Cerda, & J. A. Alvarez-Nemegyei, "Why Do Adolescents Use Drugs? A Common Sense Explanatory Model From the Social Actor's Perspective," 2006), cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) model (T. J. Ozechowski & H. A. Liddle, "Family-Based Therapy for Adolescent Drug Abuse: Knowns and Unknowns," 2000); and brief strategic family therapy (J. Szapocznik, O. Hervis, & S. Schwartz, *Brief Strategic Family Therapy for Adolescent Drug Abuse*, 2003). The study explains significant differences between Southern New Mexico preadolescent and adolescent illicit drug and similar drug use nationally

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## **Dedication**

Many years of education have come and gone in my life. I feel fortunate to have been inspired, guided, and—at times—pressed to continue this process. Aristotle once said, “It is possible to fail in many ways, while to succeed is possible only in one way.” My success in life is closely related to my educational pursuit. My life of work has taken me to many places, and I have lived through many situations. My world of work began at a very young age. I worked in my preteen years picking vegetables in the Mesilla Valley of New Mexico. This is when I decided to get an education. I began college right after graduation from high school, but I had to leave because of lack of financial resources. I decided to join the U.S. Army. I served a tour of duty in Vietnam. I returned to college after being discharged from the Army. My service qualified me to receive G.I. Bill benefits. I am so grateful that I had these benefits. They helped me to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees and to achieve my dreams. After college, I returned to active duty with the military. I retired from active duty as a lieutenant colonel. I could not have achieved this without an education. I dedicate this paper to my daughter, Marti Morales. She earned her doctorate of philosophy in biology and now teaches in Michigan. I am so proud of her accomplishments. She is a true inspiration for me. I also dedicate this document to my father. My father did not have an opportunity to go to school. He was needed to work his father’s fields and was not allowed to go to school. However, he insisted that his children attend school. We were in serious trouble if we ever thought about not attending school or dropping out of school. I am glad for the importance he placed on education.

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PREVIEW

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PREVIEW



## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

Although there have been many illicit drug use–related studies, current research has not focused on the problem of high drug availability or preadolescent/adolescent substance abuse on the Mexico/U.S. border area. A study is needed to address the impact of drug control, drug cartel violence, and local drug cartel drug distribution. Doña Ana, Luna, and Otero counties of Southern New Mexico, the focus of this study, are within an hour commute to the drug headquarters of the Ciudad Juarez cartel. According to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), Southern New Mexico falls within the West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). This region encompasses 12 counties near the cities of El Paso, Midland, and Odessa, Texas (“Reports Look,” 2008). The NDIC report claims there are 6 major Mexican drug organizations plus 120 multistate groups and 606 local drug trafficking rings operating in the area. These groups range in size from five to dozens of members.

Since 2006, drug war violence, in Juarez, Mexico, has intensified (Burton & Stewart, 2009). Campo-Flores and Campbell (2008) claimed that the area between El Paso, Texas, and Juarez is the most menacing spot along the Mexican/U.S. border. Ciudad Juarez, with a population of 1.5 million, has suffered tremendously from the unprecedented carnage as rival gangs fight for territory and drug routes to the lucrative U.S. drug market (Brice, 2009). Further, Campo-Flores and Campbell proclaimed that

“Ciudad Juarez looks a lot like a failed state, with no government entity capable of imposing order and a profusion of powerful organizations that kill and plunder at will”

(p. 2). Over 12,000 deaths have occurred since Calderon (president of Mexico) took office. The Mexican government claims

There are seven drug cartels operating in Mexico. The Mexican government reports that the major cartels—Gulf, Sinaloa, and Juarez—are present in much of Mexico. The Juarez Cartel has been found in 21 Mexican states and its principle bases are Culiacan, Sinaloa; Monterrey, Nuevo Leon; the cities of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, and Ojinaga, Chihuahua; Mexico City; Guadalajara, Jalisco; Cuernavaca, Morelos; and Cancun, Quintana Roo. The Sinaloa Cartel has a presence in 17 states, with important centers in Mexico City; Tepic, Nayarit; Toluca and Cuatitlan, Mexico State; and most of the state of Sinaloa. The Gulf Cartel is present in 13 states with important areas of operation in the cities of Nuevo Laredo, Miguel Aleman, Reynosa, and Matamoros in the northern state of Tamaulipas. The Gulf Cartel also has important operations in Monterrey in Nuevo Leon; and Morelia in Michoacán. In addition, the Tijuana Cartel is present in at least 15 states with important areas of operation in Tijuana, Mexicali, Tecate, and Ensenada in Baja California and in parts of Sinaloa. (Cook, 2007, p. 1)

Mexico is the main foreign supplier of marijuana and methamphetamine to the United States. Mexico also supplies a large share of heroin to the United States.

According to Cook (2007), Mexican drug cartels now control the illicit drug market in the United States and use their vast financial resources to corrupt Mexican public officials, who either turn a blind eye to cartel activities or work directly for them. A recent report to Congress states,

Current U.S. and Mexican policy emphasizes interdiction and eradication. Supporters of this policy maintain that these efforts have reduced the supply of drugs in the United States. Critics maintain that Administration officials have refused to release data showing that cocaine prices are falling, suggesting that the drug supply is growing, not shrinking. These critics suggest that more emphasis should be placed on demand reduction in the United States, including drug prevention education and treatment. The Mexican government urges the United States to increase its efforts to reduce U.S. demand for drugs, stating that it cannot succeed in its efforts against the cartels so long as cartels stand to earn billions of dollars annually from the U.S. illicit drug market. Critics of current policy,

including the Mexican government, are also calling for increased efforts to combat arms trafficking from the United States to Mexico. (Cook, 2007, p. 1)

### **Statement of the Problem**

Because Southern New Mexico is in proximity to the drug distribution headquarters of the Juarez drug cartel and their influence, it is important for a study to be conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between Southern New Mexico preadolescent and adolescent drug use when compared to national statistics. The New Mexico/Mexico international border (180 miles) is open desert and for the most part uninhabited with numerous roads; trails foot paths, and ranches allowing smugglers easy entry into the United States.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to make explicit the factors that may influence teenage drug use in Luna, Doña Ana, and Otero counties situated in Southern New Mexico, and to focus drug prevention efforts on likely advantage points. The three largest cities in Southern New Mexico, all within an hour's drive from the Mexico border, were included in this study. They are Las Cruces, Alamogordo, and Deming. Las Cruces is a city in Doña County, Alamogordo is in Otero County and Deming is in Luna County. In 2009, Las Cruces, New Mexico, had a total population of 76,990, of which 25% were under the age of 18. Alamogordo, New Mexico, had a population of 35,551, of which 28.1% were under the age of 18. Deming, New Mexico, had a population of 14,116, of which 33.6% were under the age of 18 (FedStats, 2009).

### **Significance of the Study**

Mexican drug distribution continues to grow within the border area and appears to be getting worse (U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, 2009). May and Hough (2004) stated that illicit drug markets are a part of society. May and Hough described three different kinds of drug markets. These markets are open, closed, and social network markets. In Southern New Mexico, all three of these drug distribution systems are in operation.

According to May and Hough (2004), an open market is a drug distribution system open to any buyer. The open market does not require prior identification and has few barriers to access (May & Hough, 2004). On the other hand, a closed market is a drug distribution system where sellers and buyers only do business if they know each other or if a third party vouches for them (May & Hough, 2004). A social network market is a drug distribution system in which the sellers include friends or sellers whom buyers know and trust and conducts their transactions in private rather than public space (May & Hough, 2004). Arzubíaga, Artiles, King, and Harris-Murri (2008) fostered the idea that research should be situated in cultural practice and grounded in interdisciplinary scholarship that uses dynamic and a complex view of culture linking it systematically to human development. The current study attempts to accomplish the recommendations of Arzubíaga et al.

### **Research Design**

This study involved a quantitative nonexperimental research design utilizing a cross-sectional survey. The PRIDE Survey Questionnaire for Grades 6–12 is a cross-sectional survey produced by International Survey Associates used widely throughout the

United States. The PRIDE questionnaire was used to sample the population of three school districts located in Luna, Doña Ana, and Otero Counties situated in Southern New Mexico. These school districts agreed to allow their students to participate in the current study. Breakwell, Hammond, and Fife-Shaw (2004) claimed that the cross-sectional survey is the simplest survey design that involves approaching a sample of respondents once only. According to Breakwell et al., samples gathered by this type of survey are considered as a cross-section of the population(s). Further, Breakwell et al. stated that it is possible to make comparisons between subgroups and look for relationships between variables.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following research questions compared Southern New Mexico preadolescent/adolescent illicit drug use/abuse with national preadolescent illicit drug use/abuse. Additionally, they investigated parents' job status, educational attainment, and presence, and preadolescent and adolescent illicit drug use in three counties of Southern New Mexico. This was accomplished by using the PRIDE Survey Questionnaire for Grades 6–12.

1. Is there a significant difference between drug use in Southern New Mexico and drug use nationwide?
  - a. Null hypothesis: There is no significant difference between drug use in Southern New Mexico and drug use nationwide.
2. Is there a significant difference between preadolescent and adolescent drug use in Southern New Mexico and drug use nationwide?
  - a. Null hypothesis: There is no significant difference between preadolescent and adolescent drug use in Southern New Mexico and drug use nationwide.

## **Study Variables**

The dependent variables included alcohol and drug use, and the independent variables grade levels and location.

## **Definition of Terms**

***Adolescence.*** Defined by Sadock and Sadock (2003) as a developmental period in a young person's life that is marked by intense biological, psychological, and social development changes. Adolescence is a transition period between childhood and adulthood distinguished by internal and external changes (Stevens & Smith, 2001).

***Alcohol abuse.*** The text revision of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2000) states that alcohol abuse occurs when a person consumes alcohol despite the knowledge of significant social or interpersonal problems that alcohol consumption may cause—for example, child abuse or violent arguments with a loved one.

***Drug dependency.*** Carlson (2004) stated that drug dependency exists when individuals are driven to fulfill the demands of their drug dependency. Stevens and Smith (2001) proposed that drug dependency occurs because psychoactive substances provide its users with pleasure, pain relief, relaxation, escape, ecstasy, and stimulation.

## **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

Several assumptions were made in this study. The first assumption made was preadolescents and adolescents in Doña Ana, Luna, and Otero counties located in Southern New Mexico use or abuse more drugs or alcohol than in other parts of the country. It is assumed that Southern New Mexico preadolescents and adolescents living

in Doña Ana, Luna, and Otero counties have more access to drugs than similar populations from other parts of the country because of the close proximity to the major Mexican drug production and distribution centers of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

An assumption was made that the research sampling was representative of the total school population from each of the participating school districts. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) claimed that this type of population may consist of clusters. It was assumed that these clusters represented classrooms whose characteristics were similar. It was also assumed that all students within each classroom produced variability in characteristics similar to the variability in the overall student population. A weakness of the study was introduced because participants needed approval forms signed by themselves and their parents. This self-selection may have skewed the results. This action also limited the number of study participants.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Preadolescent and adolescent drug use in Doña Ana, Otero, and Luna counties located in New Mexico was expected to be higher than the rest of the country. This expectation exists because of easy accessibility by preadolescents and adolescents to vast amounts of drugs produced and distributed by Mexico. Many of Southern New Mexico youth have family members in Mexico and visit them frequently. Also, family members from Mexico routinely visit New Mexico. Some preadolescents and adolescents attend middle school and high school in New Mexico and live in Ciudad Juarez or Palomas, Mexico. Drugs can be easily smuggled across the border and brought into the United States. A preadolescent or adolescent's father's and mother's educational attainment, job status, and presence in the home are factors expected to contribute to a high incidence of